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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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A SPECIAL EXHIBITION OF EARLY ONTARIO TEXTILES

Eight months ago at the Canadian National Exhibition and through these columns, the Textile Department of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology appealed for help in the gathering of information concerning an almost forgotten part of Ontario's history—the making of textiles by simple home methods in pioneer times and the development from these early beginnings to the professional weaver, the small factory, and eventually to the thriving textile industry of modern times. Through the generous help of many Ontario people, who have brought material, information, and sources of information to the department's attention, much has been learned. The results of these preliminary investigations are shown in a special exhibition of early Ontario textiles opening in the Textile Galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology on May 5th and continuing through the summer months.

The focal point of the exhibition is the weaving equipment which belonged to Samuel Pentland of Nile, near Goderich. Pentland was a professional weaver in the mid 19th century and, followed by his son Samuel, provided that district of Huron County with handwoven blankets, yarn goods and carpeting. His loom, still in excellent running order, shows the type used in pioneer days both by professionals like the Pentlands and by domestic weavers.

Although the story is still far from complete, visitors to this exhibit will find ample evidence, in the simple and more complex textiles, that Ontario has a rich and varied past in this field. It is hoped that in a few years' time the records of this important phase of Ontario's history may be rounded out.

FIGHTING TARPON HOOKED

Of all the yarns of a fisherman the most exciting tells of a long battle with a fighting tarpon on some stretch of sunlit sea in the Gulf of Mexico or other expanse of southern salt water. Tarpons are big fellows. And the biggest on record—fairly hooked by an angler with rod and line—was seven feet six inches long, and weighed 242½ pounds; probably much heavier than the proud fisherman who landed it. Another specimen on the list measured more than eight feet, but it was entangled in a net. Just in case you never saw a tarpon, and would like to see what these sea giants look like there is a beautiful mounted specimen at The Royal Ontario Museum. It was hooked after a valiant struggle off the Texan coast.

FOSSIL MAN

Peking Man, some 500,000 years old as well as Neanderthal Man, Cro-Magnon Man, and other well-known fossil humans, are now represented in the exhibits of the Royal Ontario Museum of Palaeontology by a series of plaster of the original skulls. These replicas obtained recently from England, are accurate and realistic reproductions. The contrast is well shown between Ice Age Man, with low cranium, heavy eyebrow ridges, and protruding face, and modern man as typified by the Cro-Magnon skull and that of a recent Tasmanian. Other important human fossils represented in this exhibit are the Java Man, Piltdown Man, and Heidelberg Man. Skulls of apes are shown for comparison, including the rather manlike Taungs skull from South Africa.

MAY POLES AND TOTEM-POLES

Druids with their tree worship appear to be associated, if obscurely, with the origin of the Maypole Festival in England. In any case, the festival has an ancient history. In earlier days the dances and other merry ceremonies were staged around a living tree, but certainly by the time of King Charles I the neatly trimmed pole for ceremonial use had been planted in many a rural corner of England. It was adorned with greenery and flowers, vari-coloured ribbons stretched from the lofty tip of it, and grasping the ribbons, dancers wove patterns with them as they circled the pole. It was a picturesque welcome to Spring.

If Canadians have been denied, except in rare instances, this phase of Maytime merry-making, at least they are familiar with decorated poles unknown in the English landscape. They are the Totem-Poles of the Pacific Coast Indians. As high as the entrance hall of the Royal Ontario Museum itself, examples of these poles are the first objects to greet the visitor. Like those in their native setting, they are evidence that those Indians put a literal interpretation on the genealogical "tree." This genealogy, however, is concerned with the delineation of supernatural beings with whom the ancestor of the individual erecting the pole came in contact. Animals such as bears, eagles, wolves or foxes are commonly the objects of this grotesque art. The large totem-poles developed from the functional house post, their "hugeness" facilitated by metal tools.

SHORE BIRDS MIGRATE IN MAY

May is the month when the majority of shore birds migrate north, the ornithologists at the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology tell us. Many of them will be seen along water-edges and in marshes in Ontario. The Plover, Snipe and Sandpiper are popular names for those most common in Canada. The Piping Plover, sometimes called Beach Plover, is a bird of the sandy shore. It winters on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from South Carolina to Texas and northern Mexico. The Killdeer, another of the shore birds that breeds in Ontario, is a friend of mankind. Sometimes it nests about the edges of the salt marsh but seems to prefer to rear its young about cultivated land and gardens, probably because the insects on which it feeds are abundant there. Killdeer are fond of newly-plowed land and follow the plow and cultivator in search of grubs and worms. They winter as far south as Peru and Venezuela in South America. The American Woodcock, another shore bird that breeds here, has been studied by ornithologists for more than a century, and still its periodical mysterious appearances and disappearances and its lines of migration are not fully understood. If it is not adequately protected, its extirpation is only a question of time. Of all the shore birds the Sandpipers make the longest trek of all. Most of them breed along the Arctic Coast and many winter in South America.